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A Rational Approach to Total Force Planning

Introduction

Manning of our new force structure should be shifted substantially to a higher percentage of reserve manning and to an establishment that is based far more on the reserves and the citizen sailors and citizen soldiers that represent the true tradition of this country.

John Lehman¹.

What Congress has been doing for the last several years is denying us the opportunity to bring the reserve components down ... It will take about a year to bring one of those Guard divisions up to any reasonable level of combat readiness.

General Colin Powell².

As a nation the United States has a lengthy tradition of maintaining minimum sized standing forces in peacetime, and relying on the militia, the citizen soldier, to form the nucleus of the expanded forces needed during periods of conflict. The Cold War changed this. For the first time in our history there was a need to maintain substantial forces without their immediate use in a 'hot' war. This departure from tradition was driven by the threat of Soviet expansionism; a threat which appears to have virtually evaporated. The broad question we now face is to what degree we should revert to our pre-Cold War peacetime tradition by reducing our active forces and placing increased dependence on our modern versions of the militia. Are the threats we now face compelling enough to significantly revise the tradition?

There seems little doubt that we will not, and in fact cannot, withdraw to the same isolationist stance so eagerly embraced after victory in previous wars. Global interdependence

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and our security and economic interests now require some degree of active engagement (a vaguely defined but much used term) beyond our shores. The question is how much and what kind of engagement, and what forces do we need to be so engaged? The various interested parties, especially DoD and Congress, are now locked in a debate over force structure and the proper mix of active versus reserve forces. As yet, no discernable consensus or compromise position has emerged.

The Total Force Concept

The Total Force concept grew out of the experience of the Vietnam War, where for largely political reasons the reserve forces were seldom used. It was designed to save money and increase effective use of reserve forces by integrating the active and reserve components, and relying on the reserves as the primary source of augmentation. As the concept further developed, and more missions and assets were added to the reserve component, planned dependence on the reserves has grown such that their participation today is essential in all but the smallest contingency operations. It is a 'total' force in the sense that the reserve is no longer designed to be a second string; to be called in only after the full time forces are fully committed. All the forces, active and reserve, are considered to be available from the outset. The Persian Gulf War was a good example. Many Reservists and Guardsmen were activated early, and a total of 245,000 were called before it was over.

The Total Force can be viewed as a partnership or team arrangement between the Active Component (AC) and Reserve Component (RC). The major issues for our discussion are how big should each of the components be and what are their respective

missions? Total Force is almost universally indorsed as a concept, but it seems to mean different things to different people. The chief protagonists in the debate are the DoD and Congress. Reduced to almost absurd brevity, their positions may be summarized as follows. DoD has proposed force mixes which put a higher proportion of capability, especially ground combat forces, in the AC. Congress is inclined to require more emphasis on the RC, including ground combat units. Congress has also expressed its support for what is known as the Abrams Doctrine ³. which advocates placing enough of the military force structure in the RC to ensure that it must be activated if military operations are undertaken.

In 1990 Congress asked DoD to study its Total Force policy and force mix decisions, and to evaluate the methodology by which these decisions were made. The resulting DoD Total Force Policy Study fell short of Congressional expectations. According to Senator Sam Nunn the decisions lacked rationale and appeared to have been made in a vacuum.⁴ Congress refused to accept the RC cuts proposed by DoD, and mandated a Force Mix Study which was completed in December 1992 by the RAND Corporation. The DoD reply is due out shortly.

The Rational Approach

At least on the issue of the force mix in the Total Force, the positions of DoD and the majority in Congress seem to fit nicely into the Governmental (Bureaucratic) Politics paradigm. ⁵. Their positions are predictable and reflect the interests of the constituencies they care about most. It is a classic case of 'where you stand depends on where you sit'. However, leaving politics aside, it is possible to pursue a rational approach for

force mix decision making. This is usefull despite the liklihood that final decisions will not be based on it. As a minimum it is an interesting normative exercise, and aids in better defining the issues.

Ideally the force mix decision should be the third step in a three step process. First, identify the threats. If that is not possible, identify the most serious threat scenarios that may reasonably be expected to arise. Second, design the forces needed to counter the threats or scenarios. Third, allocate forces and missions between the AC and RC using criteria that maximize both capability and cost effectiveness. This is in essence the threat based, bottoms up approach advocated by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. It sounds simple, but realistically is hard to make work. The uncertain strategic environment since 1989 has made step one very difficult to do, which has effectively handicapped the process. The Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) for FY 1994-1999 does contain Illustrative Planning Scenarios, but these fall well short of concrete threat scenarios. They are, as their name implies, more illustrative than convincing.

A different approach to force structure seems to have been used by DoD and General Powell to develop the Base Force. It appears to be a more capabilities based force structure. Essentially the capabilities that existed in 1990, including manpower and budget, were reduced by about 25 percent to produce the smaller Base Force. But while this approach is in theory very different from the threat based concept, in practice the result it produced may be very similar. (We have already gone beyond the initial 25 percent, but this was predictable no matter what approach was nominally being used.) What has emerged in fact is

a budget based force structure, which may well be what we have always had, at least during peacetime. Theoretical arguments about threats and capabilities probably impact spending trends first, which in turn define the actual extent of the change in force structure.

So instead of the three step process described above, I propose the following substitute as being more realistic. First, determine how big the budget will be. Second, determine what the politically acceptable limits are on changes to the force mix. Third, allocate forces and missions between the AC and RC using criteria that maximize both capability and cost effectiveness. Having abandoned idealism in steps one and two, we now turn to step three which is the crux of the force mix debate, whatever the route used to get to it.

The past Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, Stephen M. Duncan, said the following about force mix decisions:

Where significant cost savings can be achieved by a transfer of force structure to a Reserve Component for the performance of a particular mission, a rebuttable presumption should be made by force planners that the transfer should and will be made. Such a presumption should not be rebutted except by demonstrable evidence that the cost savings are outweighed by unacceptable decreases in military capability or flexibility...or because of other sound and apparent military reasons. 6.

This concise statement includes the three rational tests that should be applied in making force mix decisions. The first two act like filters, and the third like a bypass valve. Failure to pass the filters rebuts the presumption which otherwise acts in favor of the RC. First is the cost filter - can the mission or some portion of it be accomplished at less cost in the RC?

Second is the readiness filter - can the RC perform the mission as well as the AC, and be at the required level of proficiency within the times dictated by realistic scenarios? Third is the safety or bypass circuit - do other compelling reasons exist to keep the capability in the AC or RC aside from cost and readiness? These three should not be considered as absolute pass/fail tests. They must be taken in combination. For example, there may be trade-offs between cost and readiness. A substantial decrease in costs may justify some sacrifice in readiness in one case, but not in another.

It is worth emphasising what this simple sequence does not do. It does not eliminate judgement. It also does not attempt to have the RC mirror the AC, but rather advocates that each component does what it can do best. The two should complement each other, not compete for missions. There are some things the RC can do better (meaning in essence at less cost) than the AC, but many which it cannot and which therefore should be filtered out.

The types of missions which pass through the filters most easily usually fit one of two categories. First are support missions where both peacetime demand for the service and proficiency training requirements are relatively low. Good examples are wartime surge requirements such as transportation, security, and logistics. The Air Reserve Component for example has over 50 percent of the Air Force strategic and tactical airlift crews, and a growing share of its air refueling tanker resources. The second category comprises support functions where skills are transferable between civilian and military sectors. Medical skills are a good example here. In each of these categories the support missions 'fit' the RC because they pass the cost and readiness filters. The problem

with combat missions is not so much the cost question as it is training time and readiness.

The readiness filter is probably the most difficult to apply and generates the most heated disagreement. Clearly a member of the RC who is available for approximately 40 days of training per year cannot receive the same training as an AC member available for well over 200. Missions which require intensive recurrent training in order to maintain proficiency may therefore be impractical for the RC. However, other factors should be considered. For example, what is the experience level that the RC can tap by accessions of fully qualified and experienced personnel leaving active duty? How much recurrent training do they require to keep proficient, or how much one time training may suffice to regain proficiency? Does it make economic sense to loose experienced and highly trained personnel when the alternative is to keep them in the RC for minimum cost, and regain their full skill level with a short period of intensive training when required? Readiness is an area where judgements about trade-offs with costs can be critical. A time requirement for readiness that is too strict may preclude a substantial potential for cost savings.

RC officer training and proficiency presents some particular challenges. The experience of Desert Shield/Storm confirmed RC suspicions that the AC has little interest in sharing command with senior RC officers after mobilization. Certainly it is difficult for the average RC officer to maintain the same level of doctrinal knowledge and operational experience as his AC counterpart. This can be a definite handicap at the senior levels where knowledge of joint operations and joint service experience is receiving increased emphasis. One reason

given for the long post mobilization training time required for Army Guard Roundout Brigades is deficiencies at the brigade command and staff level. The RAND Study indicates that if the roundout concept were adopted at the company or battalion level, post mobilization training time could be reduced by as much as 50 percent - from a year to 180 days. This poses a serious dilemma for the RC. Closing off advancement to the senior levels would severely effect recruitment and retention of the best officers, and yet the increased training time to achieve readiness is unacceptable. The roundout concept is currently under review, and some innovative changes may produce a solution.

The bypass circuit exception to the cost and readiness tests is important but must be used selectively. The Army Guard has argued, for example, that the governors of each state need certain minimum forces to meet internal peacetime emergencies, without regard to their need at the Federal level. Perhaps, but the tendency is to create a generous and expansive minimum. Just as the RC acts to augment the AC during national contingencies, recent state disasters such as Hurricane Andrew in Florida have shown that the AC can augment the RC during local emergencies. Another policy which is often cited as justification for using the bypass circuit is the desire to avoid placing 100 percent of a given mission in the RC. The RC has itself traditionally been a supporter of this, generally because AC participation provides a source for trained personnel to 'feed' the RC, and it avoids excessive demand for RC involvement in exercises and for activation during small contingencies. However, this attitude has recently moderated, with a recognition that budget constraints

and cost effectiveness should be the decisive factors.

To be viable in the long run the Total Force policy must be innovative - dynamic rather than static. It is likely that the size of our force structure and the force mix will be continuously subject to change, either growing or contracting in response to threat perceptions and fiscal constraints. Policy must also adapt to make the concept of a Total Force work to maximum advantage. For example, legislation has been proposed by DoD to amend Section 673b of Title 10, U.S. Code, to permit the President to call the Selected Reserve for duty for 180 days with a 180 day extension, vice the 90 and 90 day options now available. It would also allow the Secretary of Defense to call 25,000 to duty for 90 days. Based on experience from Desert Shield the effect of the proposal is to give the RC additional time for activation and post mobilization training. It would also assure prompt availability for critical RC units in the earliest stages of a crisis to provide airlift, port manning, and other essential missions.

Each service has shown some laudatory, albeit sporadic, ingenuity in organization or training concepts for the RC. One example with potential for wider application is the Air Force Reserve Associate Unit concept. It is currently in use with all strategic airlift and some tanker units, and provides RC flight crews and support personnel at AC bases to fill wartime requirements. It allows the AC to retain possession of the aircraft, and gives full manning for surge operations. All but one of nine Associate Flying Squadrons were activated during Desert Shield. The RAND Study has proposed extending this concept to Air Force fighter and bomber units, and to some Army aviation and ground combat

units. Potential cost savings are considerable.

Another example of an innovative concept with promise is a change in the service commitment for critical specialties to include both an initial active commitment and a longer Total Force commitment. The latter could be completed either in the AC or the RC. For jobs requiring intensive training, such as pilot training, this would extend the payback period to the Total Force, but allow earlier separation from the full time obligation.

The RAND Report

In 1991 Congress charged RAND to provide comprehensive analytic information to evaluate "...the mix or mixes of reserve and active forces...that are considered acceptable to carry out expected future military operations."⁷ Consequently RAND studied the development of the Base Force in detail, but not as "...an evaluation of the efficiency of the resulting force structure. Rather it is a case study of the decisionmaking process - the methodologies - used by the DoD to develop its force structure."⁸ The process used was of course the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System, or PPBS. RAND's conclusion was that "Total Force Policy was implemented in the process that led to the Base Force. However, that statement is not intended as an endorsement of the product - the Base Force itself."⁹ RAND went on to develop alternative force structures for each service, with a spectrum of differing AC/RC force mixes in each case. This did not however yield any preferred solutions. RAND concluded that "...no single alternative force structure is dominantly more effective than the others at meeting future military requirements. However, some do come closer than others..."¹⁰

Whether the rather inconclusive conclusions of the RAND Report meet the expectations of Congress will be revealed in the next few months as hearings are held on the subject. There will certainly be questions about RAND's endorsement of the PPBS process but not the Base Force it produced. That result may not be as inconsistent as it first seems. Rationality is a hard test for decisionmaking by a bureaucratic actor. The design of the Base Force may have been rational from the perspective of the internal workings of the DoD and PPBS, but just not optimum from RAND's perspective. In any event it has been said that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, which is not the mental status of those who find work at RAND.

The real value of the RAND Report is likely to be its exhaustive analysis of the subject of force mix, and its ideas for making the Total Force more effective. It has certainly helped to focus the debate and give the DoD and Congress lots to think about.

The RAND Report includes some general observations that are of special significance for developing force structure with the much smaller sized Total Force we will have in the future. First RAND points out that even for a moderately sized regional contingency the AC cannot do it alone, and many support units in the RC will have to be activated before the final decision is made to deploy forces. Second, in the same situation, we will not have the capability of reacting to a second contingency unless immediate steps are taken to call up RC combat forces. Post mobilization training must be started immediately to bring them up to full proficiency. Responding to a Persian Gulf scenario in

the future would therefore require mobilization of a large proportion of the RC, both support and combat units. This has implications which have not been fully thought through by the AC, or RC, or our political leadership. It would make the Abrams Doctrine a reality with no alternative but to activate the RC before undertaking military operations.

Conclusion

The question is not what is best for the National Guard or the Reserve Components or the active duty forces. The question is what is best for America.
Senator Sam Nunn 11.

To some extent the U.S. military has become a victim of its own success. First was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the removal of the mother of all threats. Then came the spectacular Hollywood style victory in the Persian Gulf, starring larger than life heroes and a dazzling array of special effects. Desert Storm set a new standard, but can we live up to it? And then there is Jointness, insidiously spreading synergy and demonstrating that we can in fact do more with less. Indeed we now know that less will be the reward for success. The hard realities of budget deficits mean less money for defense, and that means a new and smaller force structure.

The Total Force concept is a good one. It is a rational concept. It was conceived as a means of saving money and that remains the bottom line. In this context the Total Force we create is rational only to the extent that it is structured to achieve the maximum of needed capability at the minimum cost. That means placing the right missions in the right proportion in the RC. The trick is deciding what 'right' means in each case and the

devil as usual is in the details. Neither DoD nor Congress are destined to be completely rational actors in this process, which is where the RAND Report fits in. I believe there is some reason for optimism that the bureaucratic political process aided by RAND just may produce a Total Force that comes close to what's best for America.

Whatever the composition of the Total Force of the future, the biggest challenge we face in realizing its full potential is to develop the same synergy between the AC and RC that Goldwater-Nichols and 'jointness' have fostered between the service branches. The public language is polite, but frequently masks an unhealthy level of antagonism and resentment. The relationship is too frequently viewed as a competition for resources and manpower authorizations. The change if it is to succeed must start at the top, just as it did with Goldwater-Nichols. Perhaps its time for a new initiative (Son of Goldwater-Nichols?) designed to make integration of the Active and Reserve Components a reality.

Citations and Notes

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